

The conclusion in chapter 9 that the "traditional practices began to deteriorate with the advent of modern utilitarianism and commercialisation and today, the common people are rather unfamiliar with them" (p. 311) is not substantiated by the rest of the book which contains much information on present-day practical knowledge of the Dongria. The authors often make references to past decades, where the Dongria are supposed to "have lived in harmony with the forest" (p. 335) because "the tribals would only fell a tree if it was necessary for constructing a house" (p. 312). The "main threat" (p. 335) of the present is identified in the practice of shifting cultivation which is increasing due to population growth and other factors. What data support these conclusions? What is known about the economic practices of the past and of the demographic development of the Dongria? To make shifting cultivation, rather than the increasing local and global pressures on the tribals' natural resources, responsible for deforestation may be a more serious distortion of reality than the reproduction of a mirror image of two Dongria boys on the cover page (Dongria wear their nose ring on the left nostril) or calling them a 'forest tribe'.

Roland Hardenberg

HARKA GURUNG, *Mountains of Asia. A Regional Inventory*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 1999. 86 pages, US\$ 15.00. ISBN: 92-9115-936-0. (together with a map-booklet-supplement: *On the Map. The Mountains of Asia*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 1999. 17 pages. ISBN: 92-9115-953-0)

This timely contribution to the "International Year of the Mountains, 2002" has been published with the objective of providing a "description of Asian mountains" and of an "overview and insight into the principal mountain ranges as dynamic entities". Thus, this small book aims at the holistic approach of mountain research and development that has recently been identified as crucial for a better understanding of the diverse and often complex mountain habitats.

Since easily available information for a wider readership is still lacking for the mountain ranges of Asia, the unique approach of combining a description of mountain ranges from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific and Australasia is highly commendable.

This book is primarily a description of issues of geology, topography, climate and vegetation, occasionally supplemented by information on land use and indigenous population. Unfortunately, the publication falls short of its own holistic objective, since only scarce information on settlement history, access to transportation infrastructure or on territorial claims and political conflicts is given. All these issues really contribute to the diversity of Asian mountains, not only their physical features. Of course, the coverage of the different mountain ranges and highlands varies widely in depth and topics discussed, according to the availability of literature and data. However, even for comparatively well documented regions, such as the Himalayas, Karakoram and Northern Pakistan, the regional coverage seems rather selective.

The general approach is not at all comprehensive, since no topical maps, such as a political, a geological or even a topographic one are provided. There are just eight maps for the regional chapters on South Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, North East Asia, South East Asia and Australasia, indicating the location of important ranges, peaks, rivers and cities. There are even a few more shortcomings, such as the wrong location of different ranges or peaks in the accompanying tables, different altitudes in tables and maps, wrong national location of peaks or peaks listed in tables but not shown in the map.

The final chapter, providing a "thematic overview" of physical environment and cultural diversity, eventually leads back to the holistic agenda and discusses relevant topics of mountain development. This chapter includes the remoteness of "periphery of the periphery", resources available and their sustainable management, as well as the critical discussion of often found oversimplifications and generalisations of development trends by outsiders. The concluding message that "the problems of the mountain environment cannot be solved without improving the economy of mountain inhabitants" is still valid and needs more consideration by the scientific community, politicians and the general public – one of the central objectives of the current "International Year of the Mountains, 2002". However, a better contribution hereto and to improving knowledge about the diverse Asian mountain habitats might have been made by engaging a team of experienced authors for the different regions under the umbrella of a common guideline of topics and objectives.

Jürgen Clemens

SHELBY TUCKER, *Burma. The Curse of Independence*. London: Pluto Press, 2001. XX, 282 pages, 5 maps, 16 photos, £ 13.99 (pb), ISBN 0-7453-1541-0, £ 40.00 (hb), ISBN 0-7453-1546-1

In 1989, 53-year-old Shelby Tucker accompanied by a 23-year-old chance acquaintance travelled from Yunnan in China through Shan and Kachin territories in Northern Burma to India's small north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. Eleven years later, he published his recollections of this adventurous journey (Shelby Tucker, *Among Insurgents. Walking Through Burma*. London: The Radcliffe Press, 2000). His second book, issued only one year later and reviewed here, complements the first one by presenting the conclusions of another kind of journey. It tries to give answers to the questions that were raised in Tucker's mind while he trekked through the hills of Northern Burma and encountered various ethnic groups and their leaders who were fighting the Burmese military. The book attempts to track down the reasons for Burma's political problems since the country became independent in 1948. It undertakes an expedition into Burmese history. As a travel guide, Tucker makes use of a variety of books on Burma and his contacts with some of their authors and other sources. He does not claim to compete with the scholarly works on this subject but to present a "coherent story" of Burma's troubles. The book elaborates the first glimpse of this story that he caught while talking to some leaders of the insurgents during his journey in 1989.